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NEWS
UK has a new prime minister
p3

BOOKS
Exciting title from Jeff Kinney
p22

2026 Summer of Reading

NEWS
Gigantic price for dino fossil
p3

July 31, 2026 · Vol. 7, Issue 328 · $7.99

Making sense of the world

THE WEEK Junior

THE BEST MAGAZINE FOR CURIOUS KIDS

¡OLÉ!

Spain wins the 2026 FIFA World Cup p18

A helicopter drops water on a wildfire in the province of British Columbia.

NEIGHBORS TO THE NORTH
Canada is made up of 13 provinces and territories, each with their own capital city, and has a population of about 41 million people.

Ontario fact file

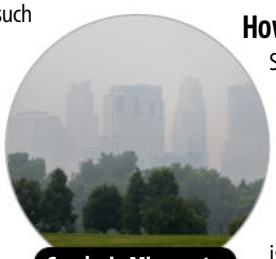
- **SIZE:** 415,000 square miles (Canada's second-largest province after Quebec)
- **POPULATION:** 16.1 million (the most populous province)
- **LOCATION:** Shares borders with Quebec, Manitoba, the Hudson and James Bays, and the US and Great Lakes
- **GEOGRAPHY:** 66% of its land is covered by forests; also has more than 250,000 lakes

Hundreds of wildfires in Canada

More than 800 wildfires are burning in Canada, in a particularly active fire season for the country. Smoke has billowed across parts of the nation and moved into the US.

What is happening?

The Canadian province of Ontario, in east-central Canada, has been hardest hit, with more than 140 active fires when *The Week Junior* went to press on July 22. More than 85 wildfires were burning in British Columbia, on the western edge of the country, and others were ongoing in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories. The wildfires were caused by a combination of lightning strikes and human activity, such as campfires or lit cigarettes dropped on the ground. Canadian officials attributed the heavy fire activity to hot, dry weather, noting that Ontario and Quebec received less than 40% of their usual precipitation in June. Overall, more than 3,500 wildfires have burned about 5.9 million acres in Canada this year. Officials said many of the wildfires are difficult to control because they are in remote wooded areas, some of which are accessible only by plane.



Smoke in Minnesota on July 16

What are the effects in Canada?

More than 2,800 square miles are thought to have burned in Ontario. Officials ordered about 1,800 people in 12 communities, mostly in the northwest, to evacuate. Indigenous (first people known to inhabit a place) communities were heavily affected, and fires destroyed most or all of the homes in the Namaygoosisagagun First Nation and Whitewater Lake First Nation communities. About 300 people in the province were rescued from campsites. In British Columbia, more than 400 people were evacuated and more than 200 square miles had burned. Around Canada, heavy smoke reduced air quality and caused health risks for millions of people and wildlife. On July 15, Toronto, Ontario's capital, had the worst air quality in the world.

How has the US been affected?

Smoke from the fires traveled across the Great Lakes and into the US, blanketing some areas in a haze from the Midwest to the East Coast and as far south as Washington, DC. Officials issued air quality alerts to more than 100 million people, and on July 18, New York City and Washington, DC, joined Toronto as having the worst air quality in the world. Summer camps, sports, and outdoor events were canceled, and public areas like parks, pools, and beaches were closed. Local officials urged residents to close windows, use air filters, limit outdoor activities, and wear KN95 or N95 masks when going outside. New York City gave out free masks and opened shelters. Smoke conditions in Canada and the US were worsened by wildfires in Minnesota, on the Canadian border.

How are people being helped?

Mark Carney, Canada's prime minister, said that more than 5,000 firefighters and nearly 300 aircraft that drop water were fighting the fires nationwide. Each province is responsible for most of its own wildfire management, but Carney said the Royal Canadian Air Force is assisting with search and rescue efforts. Provinces sent crews and equipment to help one another, including nearly 100 firefighters and workers from Alberta who were assisting in Ontario. Meanwhile, many evacuees were taken to Thunder Bay, a city on Lake Superior, where they were given shelter and medical care. Others were sent to Toronto and additional locations. Animal shelters sought foster homes for displaced pets as well as donations and volunteers.

What will happen next?

Air quality warnings will remain in place for as long as necessary, and firefighters will continue working to manage and extinguish the fires. Some blazes will be allowed to burn, however. Wildfires can be helpful when they burn up dried brush and other flammable material, which reduces the risk of future fires and promotes regrowth in the area.

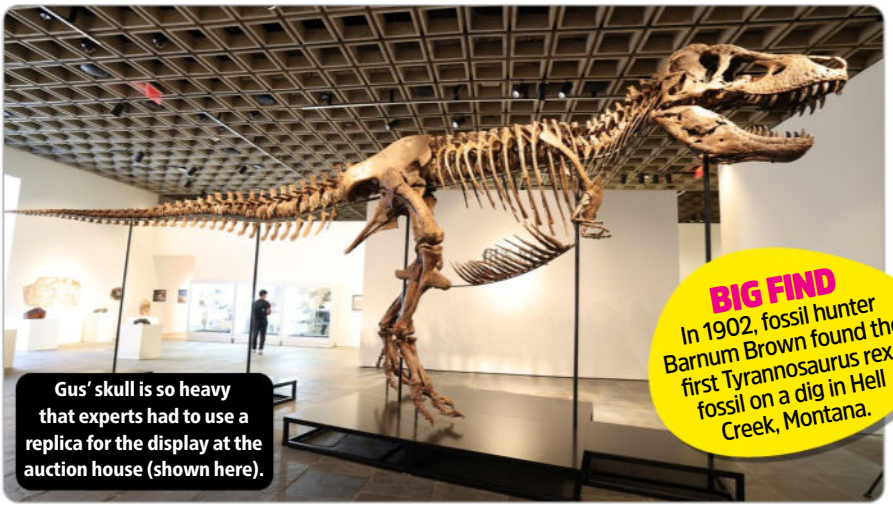
Prime minister is named in UK

On July 20, Andy Burnham was appointed prime minister (PM) of the UK. He replaced Keir Starmer, who served in the position for about two years before announcing in June that he would resign due to low approval ratings. Burnham, who is head of the Labour political party, is the country's seventh prime minister in 10 years.

In the UK, people don't vote directly for a prime minister. Instead, voters elect MPs (members of Parliament, which is similar to the US Congress). The party with the most MPs chooses the PM and can replace them anytime before the next election. Labour currently has the majority in Parliament.

Burnham, age 56, started his political career in 2001. He was an MP for 16 years, as well as UK health minister and mayor of Greater Manchester. Following tradition on his first day as PM, he met with King Charles III, who formally asked him to form a government. In Burnham's first speech, he said his priority was to make politics more collaborative, focus on problem-solving, end homelessness, and reduce the cost of living.

Andy Burnham



Gus' skull is so heavy that experts had to use a replica for the display at the auction house (shown here).

BIG FIND
In 1902, fossil hunter Barnum Brown found the first Tyrannosaurus rex fossil on a dig in Hell Creek, Montana.

T. rex fossil sale sets record

An unnamed buyer purchased a Tyrannosaurus rex fossil at Sotheby's auction house in New York City on July 14 for $50.1 million, making it the most expensive dinosaur fossil ever sold. The T. rex is about 67 million years old, 38 feet long, and 12.5 feet tall, with a 4.5-foot-long skull that was extremely well-preserved.

"Gus" is named after the owner of the South Dakota land where the fossil was discovered in 2021. Its skeleton is thought to be about 61% complete, which means it's one of the most complete T. rex fossils ever found. The bones show signs of bite marks left by other tyrannosaurs, either during a fight or after Gus died, when they ate its remains.

Before the sale of Gus, the most expensive dinosaur fossil was a Stegosaurus called Apex that sold for $44.6 million in 2024 to private collector Ken Griffin. Another T. rex fossil, known as Stan, sold for $31.8 million in 2020.

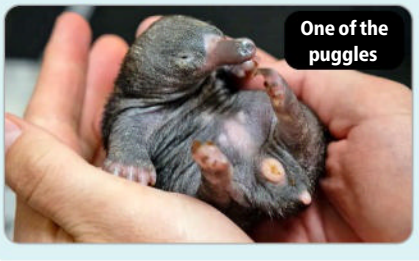
The sale of fossils like Gus to private collectors is controversial within the scientific community. Auctions drive up prices, which makes important fossils too expensive for museums or universities to purchase. Many people argue that this prevents scientists from studying the fossils and the public from seeing them. But other experts say that sales like these are needed to fund further excavation and research.

After purchasing Apex, Griffin loaned it to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, where experts can study it and the public can see it until 2028. It is unclear whether Gus will be made available in a similar way.

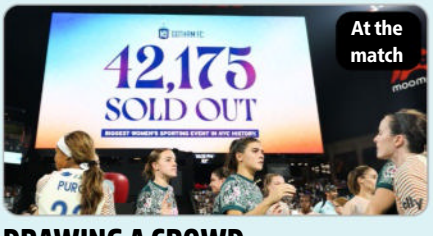
IT'S AN AMAZING WEEK FOR...

DOUBLE THE JOY

The San Diego Zoo Safari Park in California welcomed two baby echidnas, which are called puggles. It's rare for two echidnas, which are similar to platypuses, to hatch at the same time, making these siblings extra special.



One of the puggles



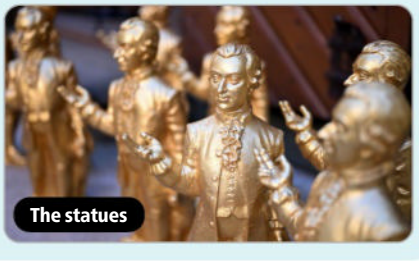
At the match

DRAWING A CROWD

National Women's Soccer League team Gotham FC set a record for the largest crowd in New York City women's sports history on July 15. That night, 42,175 people saw them beat the Washington Spirit, 1–0, at Citi Field. The team called it a "historic night of women's soccer."

MINI MOZARTS

To celebrate the 270th anniversary of the birth of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Salzburg, Austria, 300 gold-colored statues of the composer and his beloved dog have been placed all over the city. The statues are 20 inches tall and meant to "show his human side," the artist who designed them said.



The statues

ON THE COVER: GETTY IMAGES (4); ON THIS PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (4); SAN DIEGO ZOO WILDLIFE ALLIANCE; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (3)

DID YOU KNOW?
Before 1883, US towns set their clocks to noon based on when the sun reached its highest position in the sky, resulting in slightly different times in each city.

The Capitol building, where Congress meets

Two states have opted out

Arizona and Hawaii don't follow Daylight Saving Time, remaining on standard time year-round. Why? In Arizona, officials said the hot climate would cause residents to run air conditioners longer. In Hawaii, its proximity to the equator means that sunrise and sunset happen at about the same time each day, making the time change unnecessary.

House votes on Daylight Saving Time

On July 15, the House of Representatives (one half of Congress, which makes laws) voted to permanently have the country follow Daylight Saving Time (DST), which would eliminate the need for people to change their clocks twice a year.

What is Daylight Saving Time?

DST is the practice of "springing" clocks ahead by one hour on the second Sunday in March. This allows people to take advantage of the increase in daylight in the warmer months by having darkness begin later in the evening. On the first Sunday in November, clocks "fall" back one hour to standard time. The US began adjusting the clocks in 1918 during World War I (1914–1918) to conserve power and fuel. In 1966, DST was permanently adopted as part of the Uniform Time Act.

What happened?

The Sunshine Protection Act was introduced in the House by Vern Buchanan, a Republican representative from Florida, and it passed with bipartisan support by a vote of 308–117. Under the bill, the US would operate on DST year-round. To become law, the bill must next pass the Senate (other half of Congress) and be signed into law by President Donald Trump, who said he supports the legislation. The bill was first introduced in the Senate in 2018 but never reached a vote. It has been reintroduced in Congress every year since then.

What are some opinions about the bill?

Supporters of the bill point to research that shows that injuries and heart attacks increase in the days after the US changes the clocks, possibly because people are getting less sleep while adjusting to the new time. Sleep experts say, however, that if one of the time options were to become permanent, standard time is a healthier choice than DST. That's because making DST permanent would cause sunrise to happen after 9 a.m. in some parts of the US during the winter, which could disrupt people's internal body clocks. Some lawmakers said they know Americans dislike the twice-a-year time adjustment but aren't sure of the best solution.

What will happen next?

The bill has gone to the Senate, but it is unclear when it might come to the floor for a vote. When it does, passing it would require at least 60 out of 100 lawmakers to vote in favor of it.

WORD OF THE WEEK

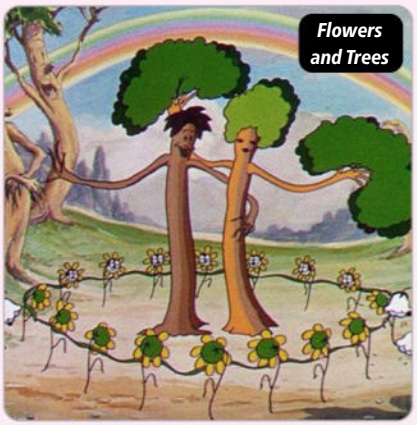
X-RAY

An "x-ray" uses radiation to take pictures inside the body. The word came about in 1895 when a German scientist experimenting with a glass tube discovered that an invisible ray caused the tube to glow. He didn't know what the ray was, so he named it "x" (used in mathematics to signify an unknown value) and *strahl*, "ray" in German.

THE WEEK IN HISTORY

July 30, 1932
Classic animated film debuts

On July 30, 1932, Walt Disney's animated short film *Flowers and Trees* made its premiere. The eight-minute movie, which was Disney's first film in color, is about two young trees that fall in love in a bustling forest. It went on to become the first animated film to win an Academy Award and is preserved in the Library of Congress's National Film Registry because of its cultural significance.



Flowers and Trees

JD and Usha Vance in 2025

Vance family welcomes baby

Vice President JD Vance and Second Lady Usha Vance announced the birth of their fourth child, a boy named Alec Neel Vance, on July 19. The baby—who joins older siblings Ewan, Vivek, and Mirabel (ages 9, 6, and 4)—is the first child born to a current Vice President and his wife in more than 150 years. In 1870, Second Lady Ellen Wade, wife of Schuyler Colfax, who served as Vice President under President Ulysses S. Grant, gave birth to a son.

A wind farm in Colorado

Energy milestone for Colorado

In the first three months of 2026, a record 53% of Colorado's electricity came from renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, and hydrogen. The state is predicted to finish the year with 50% of its power coming from these energy sources, which don't pollute the environment. In 2025, 43% of the state's electricity came from renewable energy.

A red wolf

Wolves recover in North Carolina

The US Fish and Wildlife Service reported that the red wolf, the world's most endangered wolf, is rebounding in the wild in North Carolina. Four litters of red pups were born there in the past year, and 12 to 16 pups are believed to be thriving. Vehicle collisions are a leading cause of death for the red wolves, and North Carolina recently secured funding to build wildlife crossings to protect the species.

GETTY IMAGES (7); ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (4); DISNEY

Jalen Brunson

A'ja Wilson

HOW IT WORKS
The ESPY Awards are voted on by fans who choose from a list of nominees selected by ESPN.

ESPY Awards presented to athletes

Outstanding players, teams, and achievements in sports were celebrated on July 15 at the 2026 ESPY Awards ceremony in New York City. The ESPYs, which stand for Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly, are given by ESPN, the sports media company. The ceremony was hosted by *Saturday Night Live* performer Marcello Hernández.

The award for Best Team went to the New York Knicks, who won their first NBA (National Basketball Association) championship in more than 50 years. Captain Jalen Brunson also earned three honors: Best Athlete in men's sports, Best NBA Player, and Best Championship Performance. WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) star A'ja Wilson, who plays for the Las Vegas Aces, was named Best Athlete in women's sports and Best WNBA Player. This year, she led the Aces to their third championship win in four years.

Best College Athlete in women's sports went to basketball player Lauren Betts, who guided the University of California, Los Angeles, to their first national championship. Best College Athlete in men's sports was awarded to football player Fernando Mendoza, who led Indiana University to its first national championship.

Major League Baseball (MLB) player Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Dodgers was named Best MLB Player for a record sixth year in a row. Figure skater Alysa Liu earned Breakthrough Athlete for her gold-medal performance at the 2026 Winter Olympics in February. Declan Farmer of the Paralympic sled hockey team was named Best Athlete with a Disability.

Declan Farmer

The Muhammad Ali Sports Humanitarian Award, which honors athletes for making a difference, went to NBA star Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors. He and his wife, Ayesha Curry, founded the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, which has provided more than 35 million nutritious meals to children in Oakland, California, given $20 million to literacy programs, and remodeled community gyms. "When you invest in a child, you're investing in everything that's possible for their future," Curry said in his acceptance speech.

THE WEEK'S SILLIEST HEADLINE

"Bear steals golf clubs from cart on British Columbia course" *UPI*

Around the world

The crew

Baikonur, Kazakhstan
International crew flies to space

A few hours after launching from the Baikonur Cosmodrome on July 14, the Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft successfully docked at the International Space Station (ISS, a lab orbiting 254 miles from Earth). The spacecraft's crew was made up of NASA astronaut Anil Menon (above left) and Russian cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina. They plan to spend more than eight months doing scientific research aboard the station.

The sculpture

Ráquira, Colombia
The world's largest piggy bank

A sculpture in Ráquira has broken a record, officially becoming the world's largest piggy bank. Created from clay, concrete, and steel beams, the supersize swine stands about 29 feet high and 33 feet wide. Visitors can gaze over the countryside from the pig's snout or walk inside to see a gallery showcasing the town's history of ceramic crafts. They can also drop coins into a slot, and this money will be donated to local animal shelters.

Some of the debris

Peru
Search for earthquake survivors

Rescuers began searching for survivors after a 5.5 magnitude earthquake shook the Andes region on July 18. Several buildings, including homes and a historic church, collapsed. At least six people died, and more than 30 were injured. Officials say many buildings in the region were made using traditional materials like soil and straw, which can weaken during quakes.

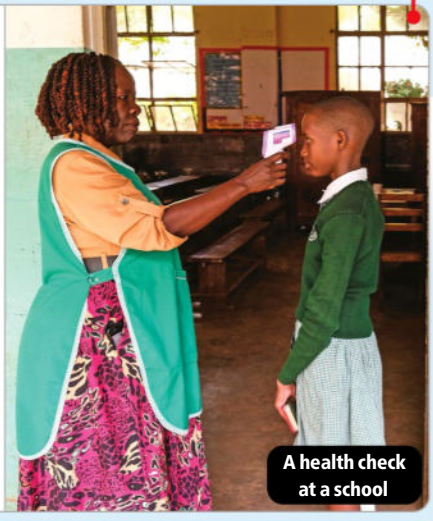
Italy
Delivery workers go on strike

Italy's food delivery workers went on strike (refusal to work as a form of protest) on July 15 to demand protection during heat waves. As temperatures have risen above 100° F, some cities are limiting deliveries during the hottest times of day. But this means workers earn less money, so they want companies to pay them when it's too hot to work.

Striking workers

Uganda
Outbreak ending

There are now no known cases of the Ebola virus in Uganda, after the last patient being treated for the disease left the hospital. The first case was identified in May. Since then, doctors have recorded 20 cases and two deaths in the country, although experts say the true numbers could be higher. Uganda must wait 42 days before it can be declared officially Ebola-free, but the country's health minister called this "a moment of joy."


A health check at a school

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS; INDIAN MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS/X; NASA; ALAMY; REUTERS (2); ADOBE STOCK; GETTY IMAGES (2); SHUTTERSTOCK

Around the world

Serhiy Koretsky

Kyiv, Ukraine
Leadership changes

As part of a reshuffle of Ukraine's leadership, Serhiy Koretsky was appointed the country's new prime minister. President Volodymyr Zelensky also fired popular defense minister Mykhailo Fedorov, sparking public protests. After protesters called for the removal of top general Oleksandr Syrskyi, Zelensky replaced him with Mykhailo Drapatyi.

Members of the royal family

Tokyo, Japan
New rules for royalty

Japan's parliament approved new rules that will allow more people to become members of the royal family. Distant male relatives over age 15 will be permitted to join the family, and women will be allowed to keep their royal status if they marry someone outside the family. Women will still be banned from being emperors, however. This means Princess Aiko, Emperor Naruhito's only child, cannot become emperor in the future.

Taiwanese mangoes

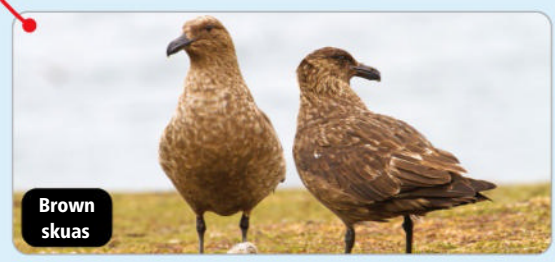
Taiwan
Mangoes shipped overseas

Mangoes from Taiwan are being shipped to Europe for the first time. The island is known for its plump, juicy mangoes, but usually they are sold only to customers in Taiwan or nearby Asian countries. Now the government wants farmers to export the fruit to European nations, including France and the UK, which typically buy their mangoes from India and Pakistan. Experts expect Taiwanese mangoes to sell well, even at a high price.

Haryana, India
Eco-friendly train

India introduced its first hydrogen-powered train on July 17. The "NaMo Green Rail" was made in the country and travels 47 miles per hour along a 90-mile railway in the state of Haryana. With eight passenger cars, it can carry up to 2,600 people per trip. The train's electricity comes from hydrogen and oxygen, and it emits water vapor rather than harmful gases. This launch is a step toward India's goal to reduce carbon emissions.

The train


Brown skuas

Wellington, New Zealand
First bird flu case confirmed

New Zealand has confirmed its first case of bird flu after a brown skua seabird in Wellington tested positive for the virus. Experts say an outbreak could have a big impact on native birds since 80% of them are endangered. Vaccines have been prepared for some species. Officials have set up a hotline to report cases and are monitoring wildlife sanctuaries, farms, and vets for sick birds.

Should the Moon have its own time zone?

With more Moon missions planned, some say a lunar time zone could be helpful.

What you need to know

- **Current Moon missions use the time zone of the place they launched from.**
- **The European Space Agency proposed a lunar time zone in 2023, and NASA (the US space agency) announced in 2024 that it intends to develop Coordinated Lunar Time (CLT).**
- **NASA plans to use precise atomic clocks, which are also used on Earth, to calculate time on the Moon.**
- **On the Moon, time moves about 56 microseconds faster every day than it does on Earth.**

FACT FILE North America had more than 144 local time zones until 1883, when railroad companies established four standard ones.

Space agencies and private space companies around the world are undertaking missions to explore the Moon. China, India, and Japan have recently put robotic vehicles on the lunar surface, while NASA sent astronauts around the Moon and back on its Artemis II mission and hopes to put humans on the lunar surface in 2028. Some people say that with so much activity, it could get confusing—and even dangerous—if teams working from different time zones conduct Moon missions at the same time. To avoid this problem, they have called for a specific lunar time zone. But others say that's not a great idea. What do you think? Should the Moon have its own time zone?

Yes—accuracy is important

A day on the Moon is 56 microseconds (one millionth of a second) shorter than a day on Earth. That may not sound like much, but it's enough to affect complex scientific missions that require total precision. If missions are on even slightly different timelines, it puts human lives and spacecraft that cost billions of dollars at risk. Plus, international cooperation is an important aspect of space exploration. A single time zone would encourage all space agencies and companies to communicate and work together. And if we figure out how to set a lunar time zone, we'll know how to do it when we explore Mars and other planets in the future.

No—it's too confusing

Everyone has to agree to use the single time zone in order for it to work, and there's no guarantee that every country, agency, or company would sign on. There have already been multiple lunar missions using different Earth-based time zones, and everything has been fine. There's no real need to create an entirely new time-keeping system that could actually be more confusing. And even with increased lunar exploration in the coming years, it's unlikely that so many missions will happen at once that major problems will occur. Besides, no one is entirely sure how to establish a correct lunar time or whether it will even work.

YES Three reasons the Moon should have its own time zone

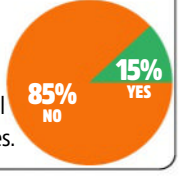
1. **A new lunar time zone would be more accurate, down to the millisecond, which helps scientists and protects missions.**
2. **One time zone for the Moon would support and promote international cooperation and goodwill.**
3. **It's a step toward setting up time zones for other planets we may explore one day.**

NO Three reasons the Moon should not have its own time zone

1. **Even if NASA or another agency created a lunar time zone, there's no guarantee everyone would use it.**
2. **There's no need for it—people have been using different time zones for lunar missions without problems.**
3. **Scientists aren't even sure how a separate time zone on the Moon would work.**

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if all zoos should be closed. Your feelings were clear: A majority of you said no, they shouldn't all be shuttered, and a handful of you said yes.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote YES if you think the Moon should have its own time zone or NO if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.

GETTY IMAGES

A new pioneer in space

John McFall is paving the way for astronauts with physical disabilities.

British Paralympic sprinter, surgeon, and astronaut John McFall is on track to become the first astronaut with a physical disability to travel to space. As a member of the European Space Agency (ESA), he is training for a mission that could send him to Haven-1, a commercial space station that is currently being built, as early as 2027.

Running in the 2008 Paralympics

Growing up in Surrey, England, McFall was passionate about playing sports, such as hockey and rugby. At age 19, he lost his right leg above the knee in a motorcycle accident. He discovered adaptive athletics and taught himself to run using a prosthetic (artificial) leg. McFall went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in sports science from universities in Wales.

McFall made his Paralympic debut representing Great Britain at the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, China, where he won a bronze medal in the 100-meter dash for above-the-knee amputees. Later that year, he retired from competing to attend medical school and become a surgeon with the UK's National Health Service.

In 2022, McFall joined an ESA program that studied whether people with physical disabilities could safely participate in space missions. In June, the ESA announced a partnership with Vast, the US aerospace company that is building Haven-1 and will send McFall to space.

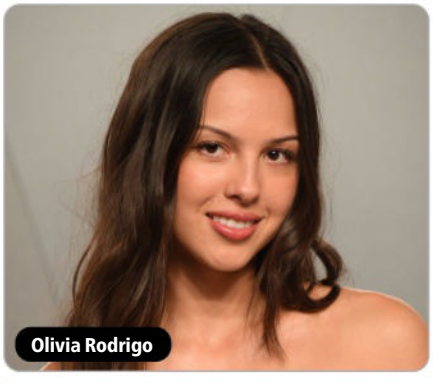
McFall said he is excited to use the skills he's learned from competing and practicing medicine in space. He wants to help researchers learn how people with limb amputations experience space. He also hopes to inspire future generations. "Science is for everyone, and space travel, hopefully, can be for everyone," McFall said.

John McFall

DID YOU KNOW?
NASA astronaut Pete Conrad (1930–1999), who became the third person to walk on the Moon in 1969, had the learning disability dyslexia.

Artist on a mission

Grammy-winning pop star Olivia Rodrigo has announced a new music festival featuring an all-female lineup, with the proceeds going toward organizations that support and advocate for women and girls. The festival, Daisy Chain Fields, will take place on August 29 in Irvine, California. Participating artists include Chappell Roan, Stevie Nicks, and Katseye. Rodrigo told *Good Morning America* that she hopes Daisy Chain Fields will show women and girls that "we're all way stronger when we come together and support one another."


Olivia Rodrigo

Karim López

Making hoops history

At the 2026 National Basketball Association (NBA) Draft in June, Karim López became the first Mexican-born player to be selected in the first round. The 19-year-old forward, who is from Hermosillo, Mexico, will play for the Memphis Grizzlies. López trained in Spain with Joventut Badalona's youth academy, played professionally in New Zealand, and was on the Mexico National Team. At the draft, he wore a custom suit jacket featuring Mexico's flag. López called the moment "special" and said he values "representing all those people and making them proud."

OVERHEARD

"There's nothing better than laughing and giggling with your friends."

Joan Cusack, the actress who voices the character of Jessie in *Toy Story 5*, on one of the film's messages

ESA/P. SEBIROT; GETTY IMAGES (4)

HAPPY HOMES
Animals that live in mangrove forests include Bengal tigers, proboscis monkeys, and saltwater crocodiles.

A mangrove forest in Thailand

Mangrove forests are recovering

After many years of decline, mangrove forests are showing signs of recovery, according to a new study. The recent improvement is the result of natural processes as well as human efforts to protect and restore these valuable forests.

Mangroves are species of trees and shrubs that grow mostly along coasts, rivers, and estuaries (places where a river meets the sea). They are found worldwide in places with warm temperatures. The study mapped these forests in more detail than ever before, using images taken by a new satellite in space.

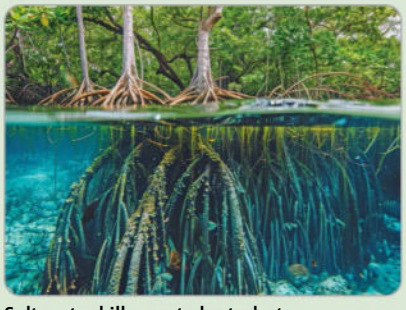
Planting mangroves

Mangrove forests provide a habitat for many wildlife species, both above and below the water's surface. They often serve as nurseries for endangered fish, such as the rainbow parrotfish, sheltering the young as they grow into adults. The tree networks are also helpful to people who live in coastal communities because mangroves' tangled roots help to protect the shore against the effects of severe storms and rising sea levels. For example, in 2004, a tsunami (giant wave caused by an earthquake) did less damage in areas that had a high number of mangroves. The trees also remove carbon dioxide gas from the air and store it in the soil beneath them. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere contributes to climate change.

In the past century, many mangrove forests were chopped down by humans to make room for towns and farms. Between the 1980s and 2010, about 4,600 square miles of mangrove forest were lost. But in the past 16 years, mangroves have been making a comeback.

While some of this recovery can be traced to human efforts to plant mangrove trees, much of it has taken place because forests have been allowed to restore themselves. As more people have realized how important they are, fewer mangroves have been cut down. This has enabled forests to expand naturally. "After decades of loss, we're finally seeing a global turning point for mangroves," said researcher Zhen Zhang, lead author of the new study.

Surviving in salty water



Salt water kills most plants, but mangroves manage to remove the salt. They do this in various ways, depending on the species. Many have barriers in their roots that filter out salt so it can't get inside. Some species have special roots called pneumatophores that grow up through the water and take in oxygen from the air above, like a snorkel.

Some mangroves get rid of salt through their leaves. This causes salt crystals to form on the leaves—which would taste salty if you licked them! Other trees gather the salt in older leaves or bark. When the leaves or bark fall off, the salt goes too.

A bumblebee

Bumblebees learn to solve problems

They may have brains the size of a sesame seed, but a new study suggests that bumblebees are smart. The insects can use tools to get a reward.

In the study, young bumblebees were first taught to find a sugary treat in the center of a blue ring, similar to getting nectar from a flower. Then each bee was placed in a small container with a blue ring on the ceiling and a ball on the floor. There wasn't enough room for the bees to use their wings to fly up to the ring, so they had to roll the ball toward the ring and climb on top of it like a step stool to get the reward. Nearly 75% of the bees were able to use the ball to reach the ring.

A second test took place in a different container. Now the bees had to find the blue ring, then roll the ball through a small doorway to reach it. Even though this challenge was harder, 73% of the bees succeeded. Some even tried to cheat by hanging from the ceiling to drink from the ring. Researcher Olli Loukola hopes the study will affect the way people see insects. "Some people don't even realize they have brains," he said. "I hope these results change the worldview about that."

Animal of the week: Pancake tortoise

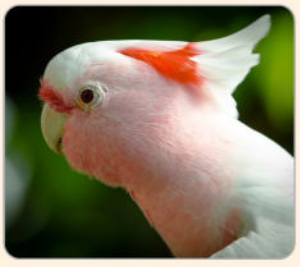
Jimmy's Farm and Wildlife Park in the UK recently welcomed a baby pancake tortoise, which they called "a symbol of hope" for this critically endangered species. The tortoise's parents are named Waffle and Maple.

- **LIFESPAN:** 25 to 35 years
- **HABITAT:** Steep, rocky hills in southeastern Africa
- **SIZE:** 5 to 7 inches long
- **DIET:** Dry grasses, leaves, and fruit
- **FUN FACT:** Instead of hiding in their shells when threatened, they hide in small crevices.

Good week / Bad week

Cougars

For the first time in 100 years, trail cameras showed a cougar raising its kittens in Minnesota, which suggests that the animals are breeding in the state again. Cougars were believed to be extinct there, but a few have been seen in recent years.



Pink cockatoos

A wildfire in Australia has destroyed 70% of the pink cockatoo's core habitat. The birds raise their young in hollows inside slender cypress pines, but most of these trees were lost. Officials are building artificial hollows for the birds.

Ask an expert: "Are capybaras faster on land or water?" Evangeline, 9, Texas

Mark Wanner
Animal care expert,
Brookfield Zoo Chicago

Capybaras are thought to swim or run underwater at about 5 miles per hour. They can most likely move a little faster when evading predators. On land, they are known to run up to 20 miles per hour. This makes them about four times faster on land than in the water.

Do you have a question for an animal expert? Send it to *hello@theweekjunior.com*. Find out more about Brookfield Zoo Chicago at brookfieldzoo.org.

GETTY IMAGES (3); ADOBE STOCK; VOYAGEURS WOLF PROJECT; ON LEFT PAGE: ADOBE STOCK; GETTY IMAGES (2)

A soaring landmark in

The Empire State Building draws more than 2.5 million visitors every year.

One of the most famous structures in the world, the Empire State Building has defined the Manhattan skyline for nearly 100 years.

Al Smith (left) and John Jakob Raskob

A daring idea

In the early 1900s, there was fierce competition among New York City builders to construct the tallest skyscraper in the world. In 1929, that title belonged to the city's Chrysler Building. Al Smith, a former governor of New York, teamed up with businessman John Jakob Raskob to create a new building. They chose a site on Fifth Avenue at 34th Street, where the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel once stood, and hired architects and contractors to build the world's first skyscraper with more than 100 floors.

Building the frame

A race to completion

Construction began on March 17, 1930. With about 3,000 people employed during peak construction, the project proved to be an important source of jobs during the Great Depression (period of widespread poverty starting in 1929). Workers balanced on steel beams high above the ground as they erected the structure. Railway carts on each floor were used to haul materials like limestone, marble, and brick. The building, which had 102 floors (technically, 103 floors counting a "secret" small utility room and balcony at the top), was completed in one year and 45 days—45 days ahead of schedule and $5 million under budget. The finished structure stood 1,250 feet tall.

GOING UP! When the Empire State Building opened, admission was $1 and it took less than 60 seconds to reach the 80th floor.

The building's name incorporates a nickname for New York: the Empire State.

Star of the silver screen

The Empire State Building is a longtime star of cinema, having appeared in hundreds of films.

Its construction came at a time when the movie industry was booming. Shortly after the building opened, it played an iconic role in the 1933 monster movie *King Kong*, in which the film's giant ape is seen climbing the exterior of the building to the top as people try to capture it.

In *Elf* (2003), Buddy, played by Will Ferrell, visits the Empire State Building and is fascinated by the elevator's panel of light-up buttons, which he likens to a Christmas tree.

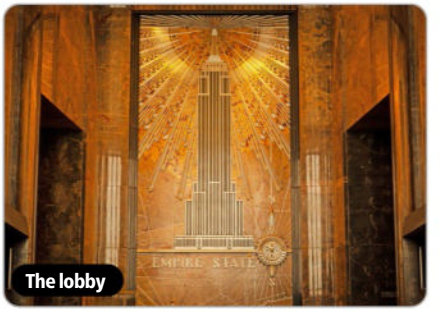
The famous building also makes notable appearances in the movies *Superman II* (1980), *The Muppets Take Manhattan* (1984), *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), *James and the Giant Peach* (1996), and *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010).

SHUTTERSTOCK (2); GETTY IMAGES (3); EMPIRE STATE REALTY TRUST; NEW LINE CINEMA; DISNEY (2)

New York City

SPECIAL ADDRESS
The building is so big that the US Postal Service gave it its own zip code: 10118.

TOWER TRIUMPH
A "Run-Up" event is held each year to race 1,576 steps to the building's 86th-floor observation deck.


The lobby

A stunning sight

The Empire State Building opened on May 1, 1931, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. People from around the world came to see the gleaming new attraction, with about 17,000 visitors in the first four days. They could marvel at the Fifth Avenue lobby, which was made in the modern Art Deco style of the era. One of the lobby's most striking features is a ceiling mural of stars, sunbursts, and decorative gears adorned with 23-karat gold. While the open-air wraparound observation deck on the 86th floor was a hit with tourists, the building struggled to rent office space, earning it the nickname "Empty State Building." It took about 20 more years for it to become profitable. In 1950, an antenna was installed at the top of the building that brought its height to 1,472 feet. (The antenna was later replaced with a shorter one, bringing the building to its current height of 1,454 feet.) The Empire State Building was the world's tallest building for more than 40 years.

On the 102nd floor

An American icon

In 1986, the National Park Service designated the Empire State Building a National Historic Landmark. In 2019, a second observatory on the 102nd floor underwent a major renovation with the addition of floor-to-ceiling windows. At night, the LED lights on the tower can project more than 16 million colors. It is frequently lit up for holidays, causes, and special events. For example, the building has been illuminated red, white, and blue for July Fourth and in the New York Knicks' team colors of blue and orange when they won the 2026 NBA championship.

*It's a pressed penny with an image of the Empire State Building on it—a classic souvenir from the building.

Scientists scanned the clay "envelope" (left) to create a digital 3D image of the cuneiform message inside it (right).

Scientists see inside ancient texts

Studying the written records people leave behind is an effective way to learn about their lives. But it can often be difficult to read ancient artifacts like letters without damaging them. Now scientists have developed technology to look inside the objects without physically compromising them.

About 4,000 years ago in places like Syria, Iraq, and Turkey, people wrote letters in cuneiform, the oldest form of writing in the world. They carved cuneiform symbols into clay tablets, then wrapped the tablets in an outer layer of clay that served as a kind of envelope. To read the letter, a recipient smashed open the hardened outer layer.

HISTORIC WORDS
The oldest known written text is the 5,500-year-old Kish Tablet from Sumer, one of the earliest human civilizations.

Between 500,000 and 1 million historic artifacts with cuneiform writing have been uncovered, dating back to between 3400 BCE to 200 CE. Scientists have either had to leave many of them unread or break open the delicate objects, which risks damaging the tablet and writing inside.

To address this issue, a team of researchers from Germany and France built a machine called ENCI (Extracting Non-Destructively Cuneiform Inscriptions). ENCI uses a technology called x-ray computed tomography to take multiple x-rays of an object from several angles, then creates a digital 3D version of it. This technique reveals the text carved into the inner tablet and also lets scientists analyze how the tablet and outer layer were made.

Scanning technology that lets experts peek inside ancient artifacts already exists. But that machinery is typically too big and heavy to move, and museums and other institutions often won't let their priceless objects leave their premises. ENCI's creators wanted to make sure they could take their machine to the artifacts, so they designed it to break down into eight different pieces that can be reassembled on site.

ENCI was first tested in 2024 at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. It was later used to analyze cuneiform objects at a museum in Ankara, Turkey. One of these objects was a letter written by a woman to her husband in the 1800s BCE. Another message was a business contract, while a third discussed the purchase and resale of fabrics and other materials.

ENCI has also been used on Egyptian statuettes, cylinders from Mesopotamia, and a ninth-century object with several manuscripts glued together. Its creators said ENCI could be used on a wide variety of other artifacts as well.

Reading the past

A scroll from Herculaneum

Researchers have digitally "unwrapped" and read part of an ancient Roman scroll that was found with hundreds of others in the ruins of a library in Herculaneum. This Roman village was buried in ash when the Mount Vesuvius volcano erupted in 79 CE. The ash preserved the library's contents but left them incredibly fragile.

Scientists are taking highly detailed scans of the scrolls and using artificial intelligence (AI, when a computer imitates human learning) that was trained on existing scroll fragments to detect ink and fill in missing information. In their biggest breakthrough yet, they recently recovered several lost columns of a philosophy text. The writing can help researchers learn more about ancient Roman life and thinking.

Fossilized squirrel poop reveals secrets

Scientists have discovered that frozen, fossilized squirrel droppings can preserve DNA (chemical that carries all the information a living thing needs to develop) from plants and other animals.

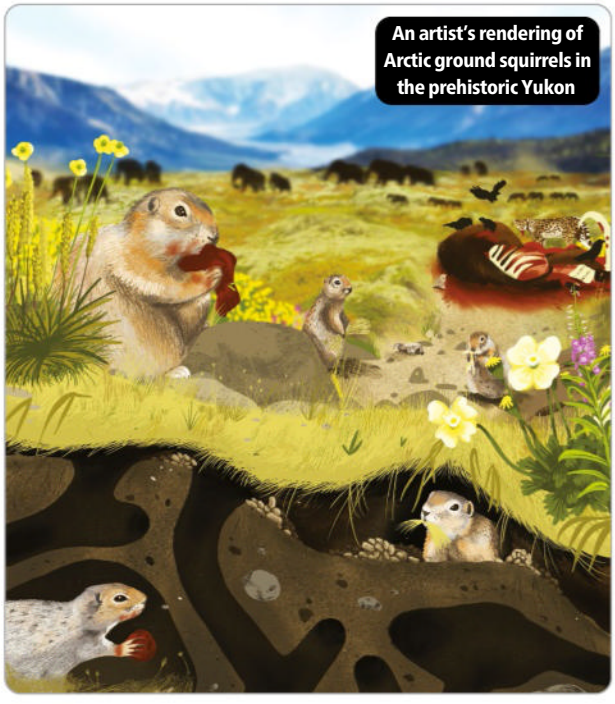
Scientists recently examined coprolites (fossilized poop) from prehistoric Arctic ground squirrels. The coprolites were found in burrows that were preserved in permafrost (layer of permanently frozen ground) in Canada's Yukon region and ranged from 17,000 to 700,000 years old.

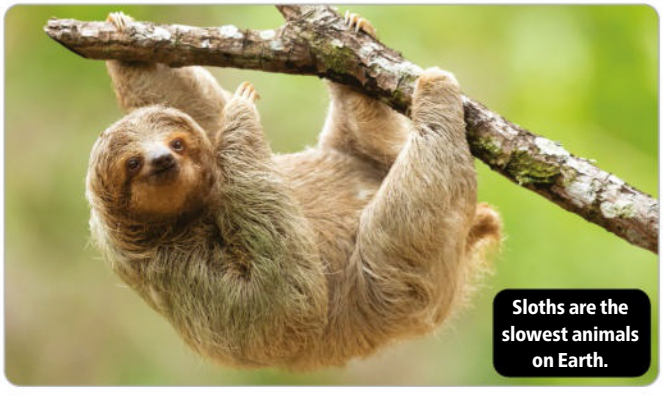
DID YOU KNOW?
The Yukon is a territory in Canada that covers 186,272 square miles and has a population of about 48,000 people.

Modern Arctic ground squirrels, which still live in cold parts of North America and Russia, spend most of the year hibernating in their burrows. When they're awake, they eat as much as possible. They are omnivorous, meaning they eat plants and animals, and their poop has been found to contain DNA from the range of things they eat.

Researchers used chemicals to break down the coprolites and extract any DNA that might still exist in the prehistoric poop. Sure enough, they found DNA from more than 200 types of plants, insects, birds, and animals, including bigger creatures like horses, bison, wolves, woolly mammoths, and a big cat that may have been a cougar. The team thinks the squirrels scavenged food from the big animals' bodies after they died.

The scientists believe coprolites may preserve ancient DNA better than frozen bone, rock, or soil does, making them "exceptional" records of ancient life.


An artist's rendering of Arctic ground squirrels in the prehistoric Yukon


Sloths are the slowest animals on Earth.

Sloth DNA could help astronauts

Because they have such a slow metabolism, sloths use very little energy to survive. Scientists think that quality could help astronauts withstand long space journeys.

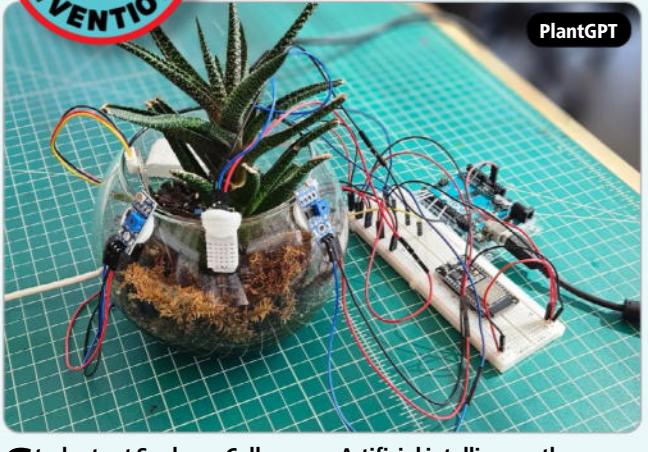
Scientists compared the DNA of sloths and similar mammals, like anteaters. They found that sloths have "jumping genes"—pieces of DNA that can move around inside a genome (complete set of DNA).

When genes move within a genome, they can change a living thing's characteristics. The sloths' jumping genes were linked to metabolism and may explain how they evolved their slow-moving lifestyle when other mammals didn't.

Scientists hope to send astronauts to live on Mars and the Moon in the future. To survive in the extreme conditions of space, astronauts will need to conserve energy. Knowing how sloths do it could help experts design tools and equipment to help space travelers do the same.

AMAZING INVENTION

An AI device that lets plants "speak"


PlantGPT

Students at Spelman College in Georgia have developed a device that allows plants to communicate what they need. The invention, called PlantGPT, has sensors that are placed in the soil to determine whether the plant is getting enough water, sunlight, or plant food. Artificial intelligence then translates that data into care instructions, which are spoken out loud in a friendly voice.

The students hope PlantGPT can one day be used by urban gardeners and farmers to keep crops healthy and provide food for their communities.

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF MECERDES MINCK/HAKAI INSTITUTE; ADOBESTOCK; BRIJEA DANIEL; ON LEFT PAGE: CECILE MICHEL (2); NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NAPLES

Photos of the week

Green scene
A woman at a festival in Japan wears a traditional kimono and hat.

Dressed to impress
In Poland, a performer wears a bold costume during a summer solstice event.

GETTY IMAGES (6)

Photos of the week

All smiles
In Coney Island, New York, a Mermaid Parade participant sparkles.

Time to celebrate
A dance group in China performs in folk dress to honor their heritage.

Amazing mask
At the Ghost Festival in Thailand, an attendee dresses as a spirit.

Festive fan
A spectator cheers during a World Cup match in the US.

WOW! Spain has now played 38 straight competitive matches without a defeat, a new international soccer record.

Spain's players celebrating

Spain wins exciting World Cup

After 39 days and 104 matches, the 2026 FIFA World Cup came to an end on July 19. At MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, Spain defeated defending champion Argentina, 1–0, in extra time to win its first men's World Cup since 2010 and second men's World Cup ever. Spain's women's team won the Women's World Cup in 2023, and the country is now the first to hold both titles at the same time.

The tournament started last month with 48 teams. Argentina entered as the world's number one team as well as the reigning South American champion. Spain, the current European champion, was ranked number two. The countries have played friendly (exhibition) matches over the years, but they had not met in a major tournament since the 1966 World Cup. In the semifinals, Spain beat France, 2–0, and Argentina scored two late goals to defeat England, 2–1. Spain entered the final on a 37-match unbeaten streak and had allowed one goal during the entire tournament.

Rodri

The final was a tense defensive battle. Spain controlled possession, and Argentina had only two shots (and no shots on goal) in the entire match. Late in regulation time, Argentina was reduced to 10 players after their midfielder Enzo Fernandez received a red card and had to leave the game.

Since the match was scoreless at the end of the first 90 minutes (plus stoppage time), the teams played a 30-minute period of extra time. Shortly after the second half of it began, Spain's Ferran Torres, who had come in as a substitute earlier in the match, scored what would be the winning goal with an assist from Nico Williams Jr. During the match, Argentina's goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez made 11 saves, a new World Cup record for a final.

Three of Spain's players won big awards. Rodri (who uses one name) won the Golden Ball, the prize for the best player. The Golden Glove for best goalkeeper went to Unai Simón, and Pau Cubarsí, age 19, was named Best Young Player.

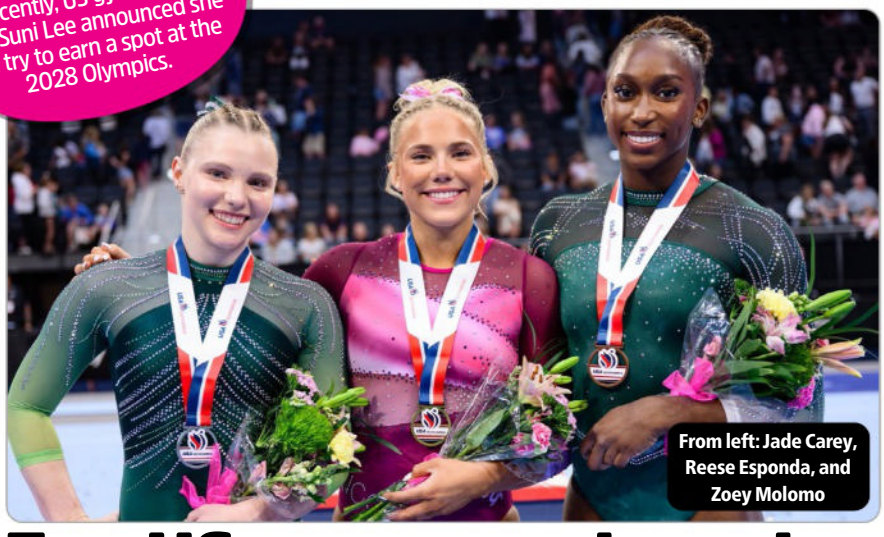
France's Kylian Mbappé, who scored 10 goals in the tournament, won the Golden Boot for being the top scorer. He is the only player to win it more than once. His last two goals came on July 18, in a third-place match between France and England, which England won, 6–4. Mbappé now has 22 career World Cup goals, a new record.

Special rings for the winners

At the end of each World Cup, the winners receive gold medals. This year, for the first time, FIFA is also giving them championship rings (above), similar to the rings presented to athletes in the NFL, MLB, and other professional leagues. On its website, FIFA said it brought "one of the most recognizable American sporting traditions to the global game."

Each 18-karat yellow gold ring features 89 diamonds and 36 sapphires. There is an image of a World Cup trophy on one side, and an image related to Spain's team will go on the other. A total of 2,026 rings will be made. Thirty will go to the winners, and the remainder will be sold for $12,000 each.

MAJOR COMEBACK
Recently, US gymnastics star Suni Lee announced she will try to earn a spot at the 2028 Olympics.



From left: Jade Carey, Reese Esponda, and Zoey Molomo

Top US gymnasts in action

Many of the best female gymnasts in the country gathered in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 17 and July 18 for the 2026 US Classic, one of the most important meets of the summer. The competition gives athletes a chance to test new routines and build confidence as they prepare for the upcoming national championship meet. This year's all-around title went to Reese Esponda, age 17, who had the highest combined score on the floor exercise, beam, uneven bars, and vault.

The US Classic was the first elite competition of the season for several stars, such as World Championship medalist Leanne Wong and World team champion Skye Blakely. It also marked the highly anticipated return of Jade Carey, a two-time Olympic gold medalist who had thought she was going to retire from elite competitions after the 2024 Olympics. Now she is hoping to earn a chance to compete at the 2028 Olympics.

One star who did not compete in Hartford was 2024 Olympic champion Hezly Rivera, who is recovering from an injury. However, she has already qualified for the US Championships through the national team selection process. Carey, Wong, and Blakely had also secured spots at nationals before this weekend.

Carey placed second in the all-around, .85 points behind Esponda. Zoey Molomo finished in third place, 15 points behind Carey, who also showed her power by winning the vault title. Blakely, meanwhile, placed first on the uneven bars and the balance beam. Esponda led all competitors in the floor exercise, which played a big role in her all-around victory.

COACH OF THE WEEK

Coach's Name: **Jaime Kiarie**

Team: **DART Swimming**

"Coach Jaime is like a second mom to me. She devotes all her time to helping us. Every time we do well in our races, she congratulates us and gives us tips to improve, high fives, and a huge smile. When our races don't go as planned, she advises us on what we could've done better and comforts us so we are pumped for our next race. At practice, I put in a lot of effort to show I care. Coach Jaime is one of my favorite people, and I hope she sees that." Bronte, 9, California

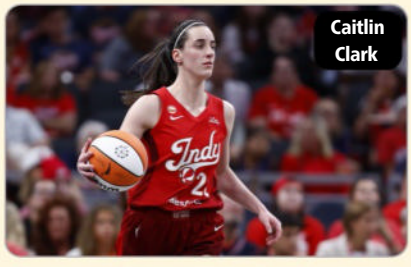
To nominate a Coach of the Week, send your coach's name, photo, sport, and team to *hello@theweekjunior.com*. Include your name, age, state, and a few reasons why your coach is great.

MORE BIG MOMENTS

Josh Kerr

TRACK AND FIELD

British runner Josh Kerr broke the world record for the mile on July 18. He ran the distance in 3 minutes, 42.66 seconds at a Diamond League meet in London, UK. His time was .47 seconds faster than the record held by Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj since 1999. Kerr's shoes and speed suit were designed to help him reach his goal.



Caitlin Clark

BASKETBALL

In a 110–107 win over the Seattle Storm on July 17, Indiana Fever guard Caitlin Clark became the WNBA's first player ever to have 45 points and 10 assists in a game. She also set a new single-game points record for the Fever. Clark hit her 200th career three-pointer and got to that number faster than any WNBA player ever has.

Red Sox at bat

BASEBALL

On July 20, the Boston Red Sox won their 14th straight game with a 6–5 victory over the Baltimore Orioles. No other MLB team has won as many consecutive games this season. When *The Week Junior* went to press, they were hoping to extend the streak to 15 games and tie the team record set in 1946 for most wins in a row.

GETTY IMAGES (3); USA GYMNASTICS; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (2); FIFA

FUN FACT
In June, several Major League Baseball teams had special Backyard Baseball–themed games at their stadiums.

Backyard Baseball

Popular sports game returns

In Backyard Baseball, the players are a group of neighborhood kids.

One of the most beloved video games from the 1990s and 2000s is back for a new generation of kids. Backyard Baseball was recently released for the PC and will be available for PlayStation and Xbox Series X|S in August. The game features cartoon boys and girls playing ball against one another in environments ranging from backyards to schoolyards to city streets to Little League fields.

The game originally came out for the PC in 1997 and was developed especially for kids. An updated version was released in 2001, and a remastered version of the original game, Backyard Baseball '97, came out in 2024. Over the years, Backyard Sports games for soccer, basketball, football, and hockey have been released for a mix of gaming systems and platforms.

Making a player

The classic baseball game was revived thanks to a former second-grade teacher, Lindsay Barnett, who had been a fan of it when she was younger. She liked how the game taught kids about baseball, that the characters represented a diverse group of kids, and that the action didn't require any in-game purchases to succeed.

The new version of the game keeps its original cartoonish look but adds smooth 3D graphics. Just like the original, it has 30 players at the start: 15 boys and 15 girls. Each of the kids has ratings for batting, running, pitching, and fielding, and you get to build your own team. The most well-known player is Pablo Sanchez, who is nicknamed the Secret Weapon because he is small but very talented. His friends include Kenny Kawaguchi, a great pitcher who uses a wheelchair. During a game, the players' skills can be boosted by power-ups such as Fire Balls and Crazy Balls for pitchers and an Aluminum Power Bat for hitters.

Gamers who achieve certain feats can unlock kid versions of Major League Baseball legends such as Jason Giambi and Vladimir Guerrero Sr., who were part of Backyard Baseball 2001. You can also create custom players and decorate bats.

There are six game modes, including a backyard home run derby and a wild Wiggle Ball. Games can be set in 11 locations, and each one has special attributes. Some stadiums, such as the blacktop Tin Can Alley, make it tough to hit a home run, but in spots like Playground Commons, you can hit a lot of them.

Backyard Baseball can be played solo or locally with friends or family, and you can choose between several difficulty levels. Fans who like the characters can also watch them in an animated special on the Backyard Sports YouTube channel.

The Splatoon series expands

The Splatoon video game series has a new spin-off. Splatoon Raiders (above) was just released exclusively for Nintendo Switch 2.

The series is set in a post-apocalyptic future dominated by advanced octopuses and squid, known as Octolings and Inklings. In the first three Splatoon games, you complete solo missions as an Inkling or, in later games, an Octoling. A popular feature was the multiplayer battle mode, in which eight players spend three minutes blasting ink everywhere.

In Splatoon Raiders, the story is more important. Gamers play as a mechanic—either an Inkling or Octoling—and team up with Deep Cut, pop stars from Splatoon 3. They crash-land on an island, and much of the game is about looking for and snagging relics and machines while avoiding enemy Salmonids.

COMING SOON
A new *Avatar* series, Seven Havens, is set to premiere in 2027 and will follow a female Earthbender who becomes the next Avatar.

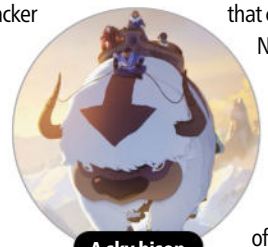
Avatar Aang: The Last Airbender

Avatar film will be released early

Fans of the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* who were looking forward to the October release of its sequel film, *Avatar Aang: The Last Airbender*, no longer have to wait so long to see it. Paramount has announced that the movie will premiere on Paramount+ on July 25. The news comes three months after a hacker stole the film and leaked it online.

The *Avatar* series aired on Nickelodeon from 2005 to 2008 and is now on Netflix. It takes place in a world with four nations, each one relating to earth, air, fire, or water. Aang, an Airbender, is the Avatar, the only person who can control all four elements. He works with his friends to end a long war and restore peace.

The film has a different animation style from the series and is set about 10 years later. *Avatar* creators Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko worked on the film, and Konietzko told *Entertainment Weekly* that Aang is "not quite the adult Avatar that he needs to be yet." Since the characters are older, there is a new voice cast, including Korean music star Eric Nam as Aang.


A sky bison

In the movie, Aang discovers an ancient power that could help revive his nearly extinct Air Nomad culture, and he and his friends race to keep it out of evil hands. Aang meets Tagah, a mysterious ancient Air Nomad who had been frozen in ice, and DiMartino said the film focuses on their "different points of view and philosophies on what it means to be an Airbender."

The movie was made to be released in theaters, but Paramount changed that plan late last year. DiMartino said he is still excited for people to see it at home with friends and "re-create some kind of community experience."

READER RECOMMENDS

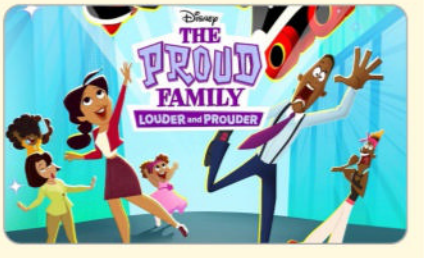
Alexa & Katie *(Netflix)*
"This funny show is about two best friends, Alexa and Katie, who take you through their high school life. After Alexa is diagnosed with cancer, Katie does her very best to stay with her throughout her journey. The girls live next door to each other with their parents, who went to high school together too. This show is such a funny, heartwarming series! It teaches you to find a best friend who cares about you and is with you every step of the way. I definitely recommend it!" Olivia, 11, South Carolina

Do you have a film or TV show to recommend to other kids? Send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

3 MORE PICKS TO ENJOY THIS WEEK

WATCH: SPIDER-MAN: BRAND NEW DAY
The fourth film in the live-action franchise starring Tom Holland (rated PG-13) as Spider-Man's alter ego, Peter Parker, opens on July 31. It picks up after the world has forgotten Peter. Then his body starts changing while he investigates crimes linked to a powerful new enemy. (In theaters)

LISTEN: THE MIDNIGHT REBELLION
This story podcast follows Joule, a girl who is mysteriously transported to a flooded, polluted, robot-filled city. As she searches for a way home, listeners decide what happens at the end of each chapter. The adventure includes information about how people can help protect Earth from climate change. (Major podcast platforms)



WATCH: THE PROUD FAMILY: LOUDER AND PROUDER
Teenage Penny Proud and her wacky relatives are returning for a fourth and final season of this award-winning animated comedy. New episodes begin streaming on July 29. The series will conclude later this year with a stop-motion holiday special, *A Proud Family Wizmas*. (Disney+)

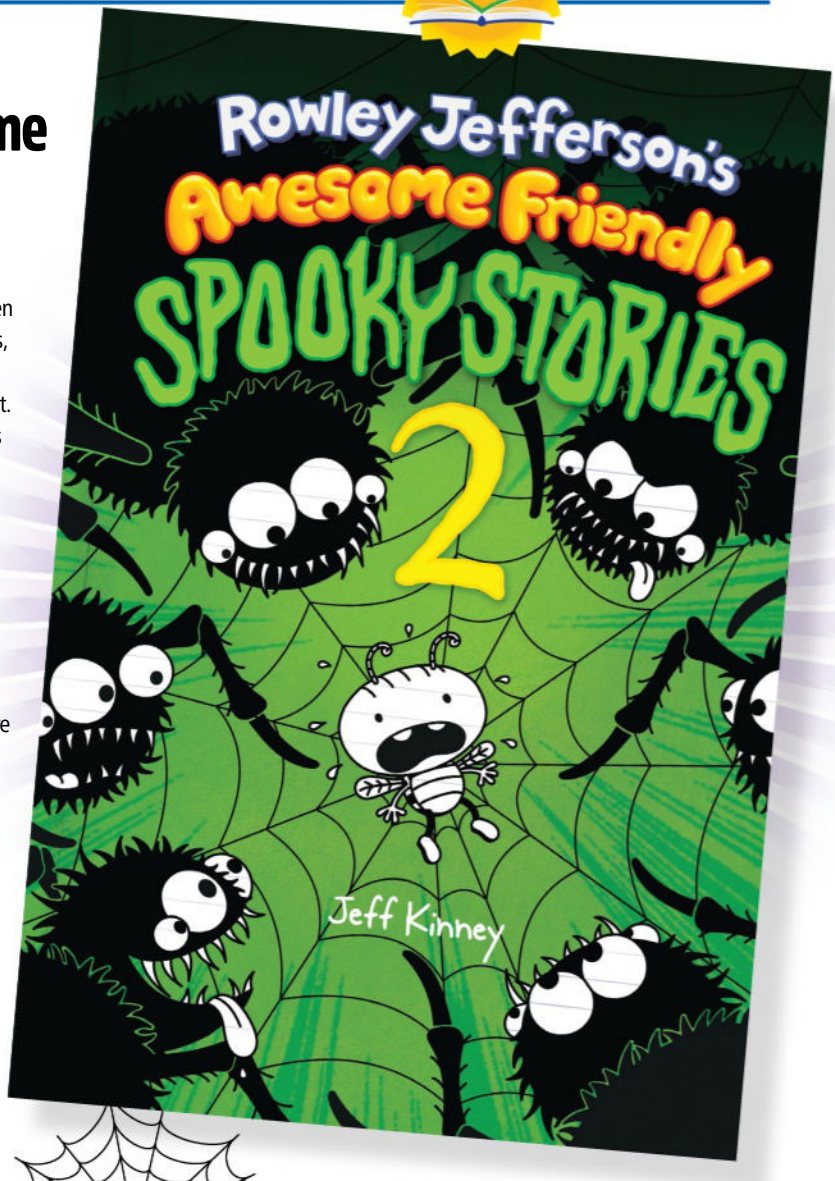
PARAMOUNT+ (2); NETFLIX; COLUMBIA PICTURES/MARVEL STUDIOS; WBUR; DISNEY; ON LEFT PAGE: PLAYGROUND PRODUCTIONS (2); NINTENDO

2026 Summer of Reading

THIS WEEK'S BOOK

Rowley Jefferson's Awesome Friendly Spooky Stories 2

By Jeff Kinney



In the latest spin-off from the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, Greg's best friend Rowley Jefferson tells a dozen spell-binding short stories written to give you thrills and chills. Just like the chapters in the original series, the book's tales are formatted to look like they've been written in a notebook and have hilarious black-and-white illustrations throughout.

The stories average about 20 pages each and feature many kinds of spooky creatures, including zombies, ghosts, and monsters. The author weaves jokes into each story so they're not too intense.

One of the collection's tales imagines the origin story of the Grim Reaper (a skeletal figure that has been the symbol of death since the 14th century). You'll discover how he got his bad reputation and wonder whether it was actually deserved. Another story focuses on a zombie who was cast in many popular movies and then couldn't find any work after changing its image.

You can read the tales in any order. Take another look when you're done to catch all the fun details in the illustrations! *Ages 8+*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Which of the 12 stories is your favorite? Why?

If you've read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, which story in this book do you think would be Greg's favorite? Explain.

Do the illustrations make the stories more or less spooky for you?

Which joke in the book made you laugh most?

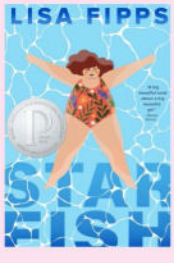
What topic would you write about for a spooky story?

What story twist caught you most by surprise?

On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the scariest, how would you rate the book's spookiness?

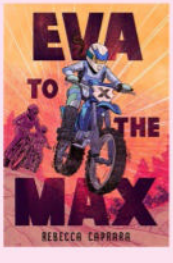
Find your next great read

If you liked…



Starfish
By Lisa Fipps
In this poignant novel in verse, an 11-year-old girl who is bullied about her weight finds comfort in her backyard pool, where she feels weightless and can stretch out like a starfish. Her journey of self-acceptance is inspiring. *Ages 10+*

You might like…



Eva to the Max
By Rebecca Caprara
Also written in verse, this novel follows a 12-year-old who keeps her hobby of motocross (off-road motorcycle racing) a secret from classmates because she was bullied in the past. Will she be found out when a new girl at school is also a competitor? *Ages 10+*

Guess the book this quote comes from

"Some of the most wonderful things in the world are invisible. Trusting in invisible things makes them more powerful and wondrous."

Hint: This novel, whose main character is turning 13, won a Newbery Medal in 2017.

Answer: *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill. A kind witch counsels a tiny dragon who worries about being lost. She says a magical rope will bring him back if he wanders too far.

THIS WEEK'S AUTHOR

Jeff Kinney

Best-selling author Jeff Kinney is known for his middle-grade graphic novels, especially the 20-book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, which follows middle schooler Greg Heffley and his many misadventures. The series has been published in 72 languages worldwide.

What do you like about writing from Rowley's perspective?

I really enjoy Rowley's voice. I didn't know I could write in a different character's voice. I was really excited when I first started writing from his point of view to see that I had that in me. Greg really is written from my own perspective—his voice is very similar to my voice. It was fun to be able to access a different character. I'm always surprised at what comes out of me when I'm writing in Rowley's voice.

How would you describe Greg and Rowley's friendship?

They're opposites that somehow work. They're like salt and pepper—two things that shouldn't work together, but they do. I think a lot of us have seen friendships like this. Greg and Rowley are not really that similar, but the chemistry between them is there.

What do you like most about writing?

My favorite thing is coming up with a new joke, something that didn't exist before and does now. When I can come up with a concept that feels fresh and absurd, that motivates me.

Can we expect more from Rowley?

Definitely. I'd like to write another *Spooky* book. And I'd like to think about returning to my favorite book I've ever written, which was *Rowley Jefferson's Awesome Friendly Adventure*. I really liked writing that in that fantasy style.

What are your summer plans?

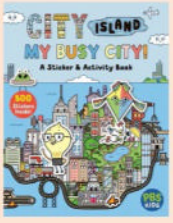
I'm going to Tanzania, which I do every year. We build basketball courts and wells, so it's pretty exciting. This year we're building our 10th well and our 11th basketball court, and those things are kind of hard to come by in that part of the world. It's nice to be contributing to kids' schools, and I can't wait.

Do you have a favorite summer treat?

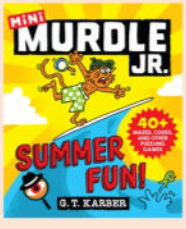
Yes. A root beer float, made with mint chocolate chip ice cream!

Activity books for rainy-day fun

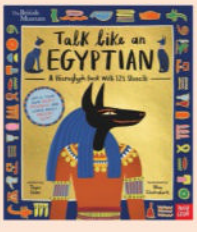
A trio of exciting new hands-on books will keep boredom at bay.



City Island: My Busy City!
By Alexandra West
Based on the PBS show *City Island*, this activity book focuses on creating a community. You can invent a traffic sign, design a museum masterpiece, and draw a map—all in an afternoon. More than 500 colorful stickers will help you decorate some of the pages. Seek-and-finds, word searches, and other games add to the fun. *Ages 6–10*

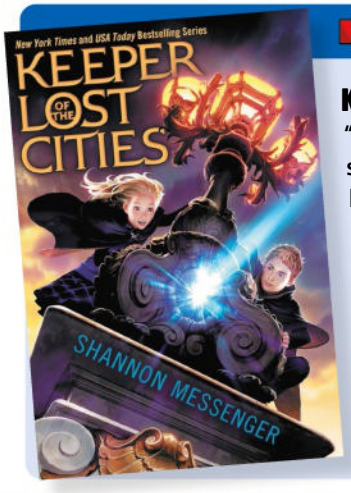


Murdle Jr.: Summer Fun!
By G.T. Karber
Cat detective Buster McPaws was excited to relax on vacation at a fancy hotel on a tropical island. But an important case came up, and he had to investigate! You can follow the 40+ mazes, codes, and other games to help him find clues and crack the case involving two would-be robbers, a missing deed, and a science lab. *Ages 8–12*



Talk Like an Egyptian
By Tegen Evans & Nina Chakrabarti
After you read about life in ancient Egypt, including the spells and funny messages discovered from that time, you'll learn how to create your own hieroglyphic messages. You pop out the 125 labeled stencils in the back of the book—the dictionary page explains what letter or word they represent. In no time, you and your friends can communicate by secret code. *Ages 7+*

Reader recommends



Keeper of the Lost Cities *By Shannon Messenger*
"Sophie Foster is a smart 12-year-old who's already a senior in high school and feels like an outsider. Sophie has a secret: She can read minds. When a boy named Fitz suddenly whisks her away to the magical Lost Cities and tells her she's an elf, Sophie is shocked. She starts at a new school for elves. There's a lot she doesn't understand, like why a rebel group is looking for her. What will happen to Sophie and her friends? Read and figure it out!" James, 10, Arkansas

Do you have a book to recommend? We want to hear about it! With an adult's help, please send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

Our annual list of "The 50 Books Kids Love Most" and more can be found at kids.theweekjunior.com/summerofreading.

BOOKS: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS; AUTHOR: FILIP WOLAK; GETTY IMAGES

RECORD QUEST
The world's largest scavenger hunt took place in South Korea in 2023 and consisted of 3,040 participants looking for 200 items.

Have a scavenger hunt

Build teamwork—and create fun summer memories—with this classic challenge.

The long days of summer are a great time to host an outdoor scavenger hunt. In this game, players try to find specific items within a certain time limit. You'll want to ask a parent for permission before you get started. Maybe they'll want to do the scavenger hunt with you! Here's how you can organize one for your family or a group of friends.

Set the ground rules

First, establish the boundaries for where you'll have your scavenger hunt, whether in a backyard, on your street, or at a nature trail, park, or playground. (For more location ideas, see the box at right.) Plan the hunt during daylight hours and determine how long it will last, such as 30 or 60 minutes. Make sure everyone stays safe by pairing up in teams of two or more, and have adult chaperones present.

A Little Free Library could be on your list of items.

Make a list

Think about items you're likely to see and make a list. (You can ask friends to help you brainstorm possibilities.) For example, you could write down a specific kind of plant or flower that might be found growing in your neighborhood, such as a sunflower. Other items for your scavenger hunt could be a Little Free Library, a red car, a spider web, wind chimes, a ladybug, and a bird's nest. A more challenging option: Instead of creating a list of things to find, write down a clue for each item without revealing the answer. For example, one clue could be "I stand on the street, lighting the way." (Answer: a lamppost.)

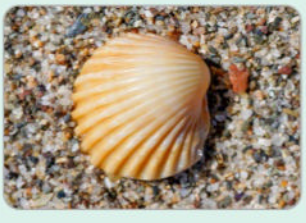
Start the game

Once you've created the list of items to find, give a copy of it to each team. Hand out pencils or pens so participants can check off items as they locate them. If everyone has access to a camera, they can also take photos of their finds. Pick a meeting place where everyone can gather at the end of the hunt. Set your timer and go!

Distribute prizes

After the time is up, compare results to see how many items each team found. Hand out small prizes like pencils, candy, or bouncy balls to the winners. Be sure to take a group photo to remember the day!

Places to look



These destinations could be fun locations for a scavenger hunt!

Beach Select a designated area—such as between two lifeguard chairs—and plan to look for things like a shell, a seagull, or a sandcastle.

City Before your visit, research a city's top landmarks. Add them to your checklist, along with other typical sights, such as a statue, a fountain, or a double-decker tour bus.

Zoo Set a goal of checking off as many animals as you can find in one exhibit or in a day. If the zoo features a map in its app, you can use it as your scavenger hunt map.

LIGHTING THE WAY

In 1417, the mayor of London, England, established the city's first system of streetlights by requiring homeowners to hang lanterns outdoors.

Brighten your space with recycled jar lanterns

What you'll need

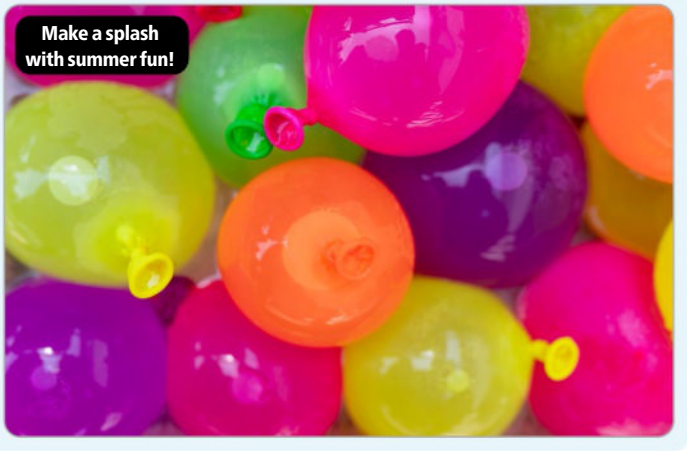
- Clean recycled jars (any size, such as pickle or jam jars)
- Colored tissue paper
- Scissors
- Adhesive: acrylic gel medium (from a craft store or online)
- Small bowl or plate
- Soft, flat paintbrush
- Battery-operated tea lights, votive candles, or pillar candles

Instructions

1. Cover a flat workspace with newspaper.
2. Cut the tissue paper into fun shapes of your choice, such as circles, stripes, flowers, birds, or town buildings.
3. Pour a small amount of the adhesive gel into a bowl or plate.
4. Dip your paintbrush into the adhesive and brush a thin layer onto the jar where you want your first tissue-paper shape to go. Place the tissue-paper shape onto the wet area. Gently brush more adhesive over the top to seal it in place.
5. Continue adding more paper shapes, overlapping them if you like, until your jar is fully decorated.
6. When you're finished, wash your brush and plate before the adhesive dries.
7. Place one of the candles (use battery-operated candles only) inside the jar, and enjoy your lantern!

LIFE HACK SET UP A WATER BALLOON TOSS

Fill balloons with water and carefully place them together in a pile. Divide participants (including you!) into teams of two. Then have everyone form two long lines with teammates facing each other. Each team should stand the same distance apart. Now have everyone toss the balloon to their partner to catch. After every team has tossed their balloon, have everyone take a step back. This will increase the distance and make the balloons more challenging to catch for each round. If a team's balloon drops and breaks, they are eliminated. The last team with an intact balloon wins! Afterward, be sure to pick up any broken balloon pieces and dispose of them properly.



Make a splash with summer fun!

JODI LEVINE FOR SUPERMAKEIT; GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

Puzzles

Word search

Can you find all these words associated with hair? They are hidden horizontally, vertically, or diagonally and can be forward or backward. When you're done, read the remaining letters to get a bonus message.

BANGS
BOW
BRAID
BRUSH
BUN
CLIP
COMB
CORNROWS
COWLICK
CURL
DREADS
LOCKS
LONG
MESSY
MOUSSE
MULLET
PART
PERM
PICK
PONYTAIL
SCISSORS
SCRUNCHIE
SHAG
SHAMPOO
SIDEBURNS
SPLIT ENDS
SPRAY
STYLES
TENDRILS
TRIM
UPDO
VOLUME
WAVY
WIG

			P	S	H	A	G				K	P	I	C	K						
		H	O	A	G	T	I	S		C	R	H	G	R	L	E					
		D	N	S	D	N	E	T	I	L	P	S	O	P	W	I	G				
	P	W	Y	C	D	S	A	L	A	D	L	U	A	T	I	H	P				
U	E	T	T	I	W	T	W	B	L	L	E	R	E	E	F	C	A				
	R	S	A	S	L	O	N	G		U	T	B	U	N	T	N	E				
	M	R	I	S	C	V	B	S			M	R	U	D	T	U	D	L			
	B	O	L	O	U	O	E					C	O	R	N	R	O	W	S		Y
		C	U	R	L	L						Y	R	I	N	C	I	I	N	A	V
				S	Y	U							S	L	K	S	G	M	R	T	A
				T	S	M	H						E	S	H	A	M	P	O	O	W
			S	D	A	E	R	D						S	E	U	S	M	M	E	
															B	M	O	C	R		

OFF SIDES

Make three different five-letter words by using the letters given to fill in the blanks. (NEED A HINT? Check the bottom of the page.)

B D E G P S

☐ L A N ☐
☐ L A N ☐
☐ L A N ☐

Out of order

The numbers 1 to 9 can fit, one per square, so that no two consecutive numbers are in squares that touch in any way, even at a corner. Use the numbers already given to figure out where the rest of the numbers go.

	2		
	6		
		4	

Fill in the blanks

Fill in the blanks in each sentence with two words that are anagrams of each other, like STAR and ARTS.

1. Most of the stores on Main Street keep their signs lit all night, but ___ ___ ___ ___ of them are as noticeable as the ones with ___ ___ ___ ___ lights.
2. The man who bakes the ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ and pastries at the bakery wears one hairnet on his head and also a second one on his bushy ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ .
3. The reading room at the library isn't completely ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ because if you ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ carefully, you can hear people turning pages.

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 29.

Spot the difference

These two pictures of the Empire State Building appear to be the same, but take a closer look. There are actually five differences. Can you see them?

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

Off sides hint: The G goes at the end of a word.

The competition gets juicy.

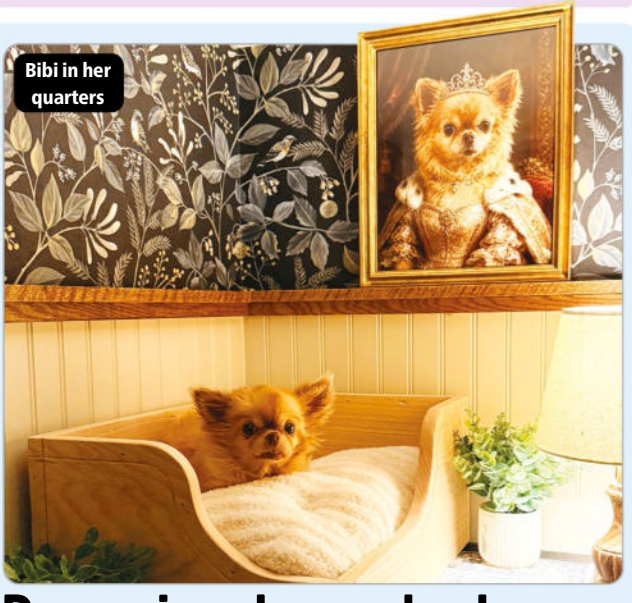
Success is sweet at this race

In most races, volunteers hand out water to help runners stay hydrated. But at the Tomisato Watermelon Race in Japan, competitors are offered something sweeter: slices of watermelon. Thousands of people, many in melon-themed costumes, take part in the annual event, which supports local fruit growers. This year it was extra special because it marked 100 years of watermelon farming in the city. Giant watermelons were given to the winner as well as those who finished 10th, 100th, and 1,000th.

Wood you visit this place?

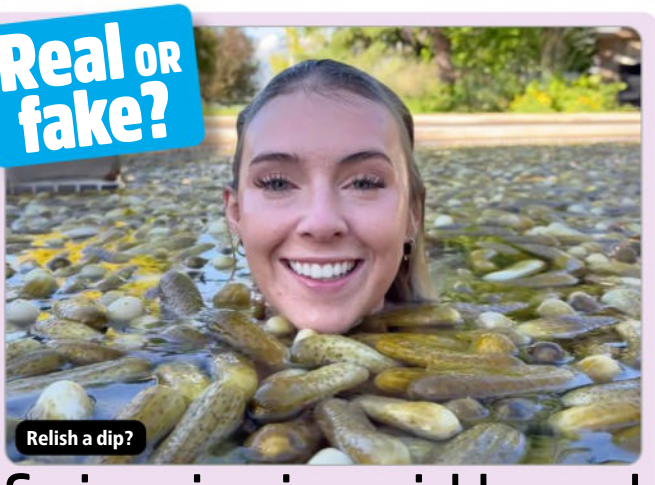
Giant basket goes up for sale

An extraordinary building known as the Big Basket is up for sale at a price of $8.5 million. The office space in Newark, Ohio, used to be the headquarters of a basket-making company and was designed to look like one of its products. Most picnic baskets may hold a few sandwiches, but this one has room for about 500 employees and a parking garage. Giant handles rise above its glass ceiling, and its main floor tiles have a crisscross pattern. "It brings a smile to everyone," the real estate agent told *The New York Times*.


Bibi in her quarters

Dog enjoys luxury bedroom

An 11-year-old Chihuahua named Bibi has become an internet star after her owner built her a "luxury bedroom." Honour Hernandez, from Tennessee, spent $380 turning a space under the stairs into the small dog's dream room, complete with a raised bed, a lamp, and mini plastic plants. "It ended up becoming the coziest spot in the house," Hernandez told *USA Today*. He said Bibi loves her room so much she refuses to leave it. Next, he might get her a TV so she can watch videos of birds.



Relish a dip?

Swimming in a pickle pool

Serena Neel was in a pickle—or rather, a pool of 50,000 pickles. Neel, a content creator in Nevada, was attempting to set a world record with pickles. But she wasn't being wasteful and playing with her food. A company called Josh's Pickles had given her 10,000 jars of damaged goods that couldn't be sold. After cleaning off pieces of dill and garlic, she dumped the pickles into a swimming pool and dived in with a snorkel. Is this story dill-ightfully true, or does it seem a bit sour?*

*Real! Not only did Neel break the record for the largest pickle pool, but she also used the leftover jars to create a 16-foot-tall sculpture. After the big-dill stunt, Neel sent the pickles to a recycling center to be turned into fuel.

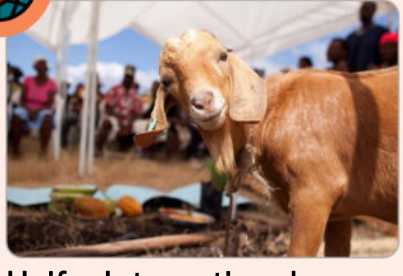
ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; TOKYO PHOTOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT; KEITA IIJIMA; SERENA NEEL; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (2)

Editor's note

Congratulations to Spain for winning a very exciting World Cup (p18)! After 39 days of action-packed competition in Canada, Mexico, and the US, the final match against Argentina was thrilling to watch, all the way into extra time. Both teams fought hard, but in the end Argentina was unable to clinch its second World Cup trophy in a row and Spain won for the first time since 2010. It was fun to see the first-ever World Cup halftime show too, especially the children from Uganda and New York who sang and danced during the performance. Several Muppets also made an appearance! I thought featuring kids was a smart move by the organizers, considering that the future of soccer around the world belongs to young people. Millions of sports fans are sorry to see the competition end, but the international action will start up again next June, when the Women's World Cup is played in Brazil.

Andrea Barbalich
Editorial Director

CHARITY OF THE WEEK



Heifer International

This organization's mission is to end poverty around the world. It focuses on creating sustainable solutions farmers can use to strengthen their businesses and earn more money. It also provides education programs and advocates for communities to have access to power and water. Since 1944, Heifer International has helped more than 59 million households. Find out more at heifer.org.

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

Increasing access to squash

Rohan, 9, Virginia, shown here with Arnie Dratt, is a former member of *The Week Junior*'s Junior Council.

"Squash is now an Olympic sport, but many people in the US have never played because they don't have access to squash courts. That's changing thanks to Arnie Dratt, president emeritus of the Squash United Foundation. He spearheaded Project Beacon, an outdoor public squash court in Chicago, Illinois, where visitors can borrow rackets and balls and receive free lessons. I had the chance to play squash with Arnie and some volunteers. As Arnie said, 'It seems unfair that all people don't have the opportunity to play.' I hope more outdoor squash courts like this will be built across the US!"

Have you done something interesting or raised money for a cause you care about? Whatever you're up to, we want to hear about it at *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

JOKE OF THE WEEK

What looks like a bagel but with wings?

A "plane" bagel

Enter *The Week Junior*'s Nature Photo Contest

Do you love taking photographs of plants, flowers, trees, and wildlife? Now is your chance to use your creativity, curiosity, and skills to enter *The Week Junior*'s Nature Photo Contest. The entry form for 8- to 10-year-olds is available at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-2026PhotoContest-8-10 and 11- to 14-year-olds is at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-2026PhotoContest-11-14. Winning entries will be featured in a September 2026 issue of the magazine. See the official rules at theweekjunior.com/photocontestrules.

The deadline to enter is July 28.

THE WEEK Junior IT'S YOUR TURN Email your news, views, and photos to *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

Your turn

YOUR PHOTOS

We'd love to see pictures you've taken or pictures with you in them! Have an adult email them to us at *hello@theweekjunior.com*, along with anything you would like us to know about what's happening in the photo.

"I enjoyed reading the article about turtles and tortoises because I have a red-eared slider turtle." Zaynab, 11, with Husayn, 2, Texas

"I loved the banana split, but I should have used fresh berries instead of frozen berries." Zander, 7, Hawaii

"I loved reading about the bookmarks, so I made the alien, rabbit, and cat!" Ellie, 10, California

Teacher OF THE WEEK

Teacher's Name: **Ms. Amanda Licul**

School: **St. Anne's School**

"Ms. Licul always comes up with a fun idea to make learning better. She has a smile on her face when I walk into school. Ms. Licul motivates kids by having interesting prizes that everyone loves. When one of my classmates is stuck on a problem, Ms. Licul comes to the rescue and explains it perfectly! Ms. Licul is and always will be my favorite teacher!"

Sally, 8, New York

Nominate your teacher for Teacher of the Week! Send your reason for the nomination, a photo of your teacher, and your school's name and address to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

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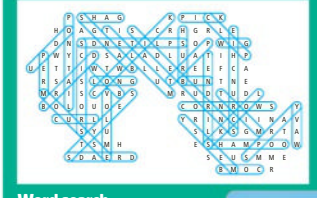
Puzzle answers (from page 26)

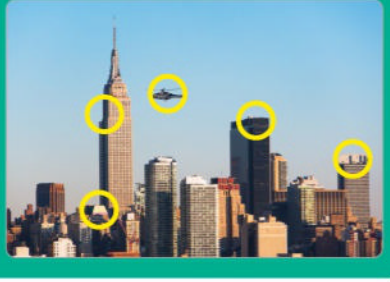


Off sides
bland
plane
slang

Fill in the blanks
1. none, neon
2. bread, beard
3. silent, listen

Word search
Unused letters: Hair grows a little faster during the summer.

8	2	5
	6	9	7
3	1	4	



Quiz answers (from page 30) **1** Gus **2** a) Ferran Torres **3** True **4** Daisy Chain Fields **5** a) Air Nomads **6** True **7** c) Reese Esponda **8** c) The Grim Reaper **9** Minnesota **10** False. It is now 1,454 feet tall. **11** b) New York Knicks **12** c) Squirrels **13** False. Time moves about 56 microseconds faster per day. **14** Secret Weapon **15** c) Watermelons

We want to hear from you! To have your letters, photos, nominations, recommendations, or ideas considered for inclusion in the magazine, please include your first name, age, and state with your submission. By emailing your submission to us, you give *The Week Junior* consent to publish it in the magazine and online. Please get your parent/guardian's permission before sending anything to us.

How much of this week's news can you remember?

1 What is the nickname of the T. rex fossil that sold for a record price on July 14?

2 Which soccer player scored the winning goal for Spain in the 2026 World Cup final?
a) Ferran Torres b) Nico Williams Jr.
c) Rodri
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

3 True or false? Cuneiform is the oldest form of writing in the world.
True ☐ False ☐

4 What is the name of Olivia Rodrigo's new all-female music festival?

5 In the movie *Avatar Aang: The Last Airbender*, which nation does Tagah belong to?
a) Air Nomads b) Water Tribe
c) Earth Kingdom
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

6 True or false? A recent study found that bumblebees can use tools to get a reward.
True ☐ False ☐

7 Who won the all-around gymnastics title at the 2026 US Classic?
a) Jade Carey b) Leanne Wong
c) Reese Esponda
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

8 The book *Rowley Jefferson's Awesome Friendly Spooky Stories 2* includes an imaginary origin story for which creepy character?
a) Dracula b) Frankenstein
c) The Grim Reaper
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

9 For the first time in 100 years, cameras recently recorded a cougar raising kittens in which US state?

10 True or false? Today, the Empire State Building is 1,250 feet tall.
True ☐ False ☐

11 Which basketball franchise won the 2026 ESPY Award for Best Team?
a) Los Angeles Lakers
b) New York Knicks
c) Detroit Pistons
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

12 Scientists recently recovered prehistoric DNA from the fossilized poop of what animals?
a) Skunks
b) Sloths
c) Squirrels
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

13 True or false? On the Moon, time moves about 56 microseconds slower per day than it does on Earth.
True ☐ False ☐

14 In the video game Backyard Baseball, what is the nickname of the character Pablo Sanchez?

15 A recent race in Tomisato, Japan, celebrated 100 years of growing what fruit in the city?
a) Apples b) Peaches
c) Watermelons
a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

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USA250

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ON THE LOOKOUT
A hammerhead shark's cephalofoil—its flat, wide head—gives the animal nearly 360-degree vision and is lined with sensory organs that help it find prey.

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